DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 156 JC 820 007

AUTHOR Sbaratta, Philip A.
TITLE The Interdisciplinary Cornucopia.
PUB DATE Oct 81
NOTE 9p.: Paper presented at the Annual Conference on English in the Two-Year College (16th, Baltimore, MD, October 22-24, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Course Descriptions; Curriculum Development; *Departments; Intellectual Disciplines; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Liberal Arts; Team Teaching; Thematic Approach; Two Year Colleges; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *North Shore Community College MA

ABSTRACT

At North Shore Community College (NSCC), students in career programs comprise 70% of the student population. To counter the vocational-school effect of programs heavily emphasizing career training, interdisciplinary, team-taught courses were initiated. However, the time required in planning, scheduling, and grading along with other problems resulted in the disappearance of these first courses. A more innovative and successful solution was the creation of a Department of Interdisciplinary Studies (DIS) to develop, promote, and monitor interdisciplinary curricula. DIS faculty, who also represent traditional disciplines, scrutinize the content of the DIS courses to protect the academic integrity of specific disciplines. The DIS uses a variety of organizational and methodological strategies, including team teaching, multi-discipline courses taught by one instructor, thematic courses, and discipline combinations. Some of the DIS courses are "Artistic Vision: An Introduction to Art, Music, and Literature," "The Business of Energy: Crisis and Opportunity," "Introduction to the Study of the Future," "The Arts: Pathways to Perception," "Your Lifestyle through Food and Nutrition," "The Future of Sex: Crisis in Roles and Identities," "American Studies: Literature and Arts in New England," "Search for Self: Beliefs and Images," "The Sporting Life," and "The Philosophy of Science." The DIS offers many benefits for faculty and for students, who are frequently motivated to further study. (AYC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED211156

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CORNUCOPIA

Philip A. Sbaratta
North Shore Community College
Beverly, Massachusetts

Paper presented at the Annual Conference on
English in the Two-Year College
(16th, Baltimore, MD, October 22-24, 1981).

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Philip A. Sbaratta

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

JC 820 007

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CORNUCOPIA

Philip Sbaratta

Interdisciplinary courses have traditionally suffered from a bad press. One of the primary oppositional arguments posits that combining more than one discipline in a course weakens each of the disciplines. Moreover, students are perceived as lacking adequate liberal education necessary to inform the student's understanding of the connections among the related disciplines. Often the consequence of these views is that humanities enrollment continues to decline. For students who do enroll in individual courses in individual disciplines, the disciplines remain discreet entities; and students rarely have the opportunity to discover what one set of ideas has to do with another.

At North Shore Community College, as in many two-year institutions across the country, a distinctive feature is the prevalence of two-year career programs, offering little chance for students to explore areas unrelated to a specific career. Indeed, even if a choice were available, many of these students shy away from courses perceived as having limited pragmatic value. Students in these career programs comprise 70 percent of North Shore's student population. Among the liberal arts faculty was a strong desire to tap this market, not only to fill a course but also to counter the vocational-school effect of programs of study heavily emphasizing career training. It was clear that the choice was either to wait with outstretched hands

until students saw the light or to take action and provide a new option to attract students to disciplines and subject matter they would have ordinarily avoided.

Interdisciplinary education attracted the interest of many faculty as a way of transcending traditional discipline barriers. But at North Shore, interdisciplinary curricula had a rather shaky launching. Although faculty bemoaned students' inability to make a cohesive whole from their educational experiences, decried falling enrollments in art, music, and literature, and became horrified at the increase of computer courses, faculty were nevertheless uneasy about giving up turf. Could a psychology professor teach history? Could a literature professor teach music; could a scientist explore ethics? One solution seemed to be team-teaching -- an arrangement which often works better on paper than in the classroom. Matching compatible faculty is no mean feat. Planning curricula, scheduling, and grading in team-teaching requires more energy than more situations. Despite these problems, an occasional team-taught course was offered. As time passed, the hiatus between team-taught courses grew; soon they simply disappeared.

A more innovative solution was to create a Department of Interdisciplination Studies. A general invitation was sent to all faculty inviting them to a planning meeting to establish a new department which would develop, promote, and monitor interdisciplinary curricula. The idea was to give interdisciplinary courses a home. These courses are now the legitimate off-spring of this new department rather than the bastards of traditional academic disciplines. Affiliated with traditional academic departments, faculty are comprised of individuals committed to interdisciplinary education. In effect, members of the Department of Interdisciplinary studies have a dual academic citizenship.

Within a departmental framework, a course is evaluated on its merit as an interdisciplinary offering. At the same time faculty, as representatives of traditional disciplines, scrutinize content of interdisciplinary courses to protect the academic integrity of specific disciplines.

The result has been the stimulation of an array of interdisciplinary curriculum using a variety of organizational and methodological strategies: team-teaching, multi-discipline course taught by one individual, thematic courses, and discipline combinations. The following are general descriptions of some interdisciplinary course offerings at North Shore:

ARTISTIC VISION: AN INTRODUCTION TO ART, MUSIC, AND LITERATURE

Designed by a member of the English Department, Artistic Vision introduces students to art, music and literature by focusing on their common principles of subject, function, medium, organization, and style. Students read literature, look at the visual arts, and listen to music. The instructor provides coordinating lectures to allow students to perceive commonalities among the art forms.

THE BUSINESS OF ENERGY: CRISES AND OPPORTUNITY

Designed by a member of the Business Department, the course examines the nature and history of energy, the economic implications of the end of the era of cheap energy, and the transfers of wealth now occurring. Further, students examine choices we have on the personal level as consumers, on the commercial level as producers, and on the political level as citizens.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE FUTURE

Designed by a sociologist, the course describes the nature of "futurism," examining the ideas of futuristic thinkers. By exploring global interdependency, students discuss major problems that may be facing the world for the next 10-50 years. The role of technology and analysis of human values are an integral part of this discussion. Finally, students consider strategies for personal and collective survival in a rapidly changing world.

THE ARTS: PATHWAYS TO PERCEPTION

Designed by three members of the Cultural Arts Department, this course integrates music, dance , and the visual arts. In addition to lectures and demonstrations, students have the opportunity to participate in the art forms being studied. The course emphasizes the relationships among sensory perceptions, modes of knowing, and artistic expression. The aim is to show students that we know things in several different ways and that art contributes significantly to our reason for being.

YOUR LIFESTYLE THROUGH FOOD AND NUTRITION

Designed by a biologist, the course considers nutrition's relationship to psychological and physiological well-being. Students study nutrients, physiological roles in metabolism, food sources, and effects of dificient or excessive intake. The influence of social habits on diets and food habits is discussed. In addition, students deal with obesity, coronary heart disease, alcoholism, food fads, food quackery, and food additives as elements related to malnutrition.

THE FUTURE OF SEX: CRISIS IN ROLES AND IDENTITIES

Designed by a member of the Behavioral Science Department and the Chair of the Humanities Division, the course focuses on changing sex roles and the effects on human sexuality, the family, and the workplace. Some issues discussed are male-female role identification, sexual preferences, control of human reproductive processes, and power in the family and society.

AMERICAN STUDIES: LITERATURE AND THE ARTS IN NEW ENGLAND

Designed by a member of the English Department, the course has four modules: prose, poetry, art, and architecture. Using New England as a frame of reference, the course includes writers, artists, and architects who have created in the New England milieu. Students take frequent field trips which inform their appreciation of the New England environment and the art, literature, and architecture it has produced.

SEARCH FOR SELF: BELIEFS AND IMAGES

Designed by a member of the Behavioral Science Department, the course examines how our beliefs are influenced by various images of self, society, the natural world. Some speficic concentrations are the quest for identity through religious and psychological models, popular culture and its heroes as mirrors of our self-image, scientific and technological images -- people as machines, artistic and prophetic visions, political belief systems (Marxism, socialism, capitalism), and beliefs and images of ancient and modern astronomy.

THE SPORTING LIFE

Designed by two members of the Behavioral Science Department, The Sporting Life considers the important role sport has had in the lives of humans and their societies. With increased leisure, sports' role has had dramatic impact particularly in post-industrial society. Particular attention is paid to cultural meanings and values in sporting behavior, emotional and recreational features of different sports, symbolic meanings in sports (heroes, myths, rituals), and the economics of sports.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

Designed by a member of the Philosophy Department, the course emphasizes the logical structure of scientific inquiry and the ethical implications of that structure. The course presents major scientific theories from an historical context. Students develop an awareness of ethical considerations implicit in a rapidly changing world produced by scientific and technological discoveries.

COORDINATED STUDIES: AMERICAN LITERATURE AND HISTORY

Designed by a member of the English Department and History Department, the course explores the events, ideas, people, and literature which have shaped American society. Instructors coordinate material so that historical events and literature are melded into a cohesive whole. History provides a context for the literature, and literature provides a creative dimension in understanding of history.

Those of us who have been part of community college education know the important and unique function the community college has had in higher education. The community college has broken ground in many areas ignored by other segments of higher education. These interdisciplinary efforts are, in a sense, a continuation of this tradition.

Interdisciplinary offerings at North Shore have built a common ground for faculty from a number of disciplines to convene. This, in itself, is valuable, for the insularity of faculty from separate departments, who generally meet and talk only to each other, dissolves. The interdisciplinary format allows expression of special interests, talents, and expertise which do not fit the traditional discipline mold. Certaintly, it is no surprise that as human beings and academics we lead interdisciplinary lives. Many of us have pursued and studied more than one area. Although we have chosen a particular concentration, our interests and training have not diminished. The interdisciplinary structure is a forum for faculty creativity.

The interdisciplinary format provides an intriguing educational cornucopia. It is important to stress that these courses are conceived as introductions; indeed some course titles use the word introduction. The interdisciplinary courses are samplers allowing exposure to ideas and content about which students formerly have professed disinterest. Interdisciplinary options, however, are not education as smorgasbord; instead concepts and materials are shaped in new ways. One of the significant by-products of interdisciplinary courses has been promoting further study. For example, students having completed Artistic Vision or Pathways to Perception, have enrolled in traditional courses in art, music, and literature. Students discover that they want to know more. And isn't this the fundamental precept of education?

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES
96 POWELL LIBRARY BUILDING
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024
EE 36

JAN 22 1982